A COMICS INTERVIEW PUBLICATION

#11

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X-THIEVES™

The land of the free.

That's what we call the United States right in our national anthem. Many times you will hear people making statements such as, "It's a free county," in reference to America. The operative concept in both of those lines — and in many, many more — is *freedom*. However, have you ever stopped to consider the definition of freedom?

My dictionary defines freedom as "the condition of being free of restraints." Needless to say, it has quite a few other definitions (all along the same lines) but this is the one they placed first. And that defintion may make a wonderful text book definition. It would be perfectly acceptable for a student to use on a quiz. But it really sucks as a working definition of what we usually *mean* when we say freedom. (Actually, I can't speak for anyone other than myself. I know there are many, many people whose idea of freedom I would consider to be *oppression*.)

Okay, so I've built this up for a bit now, right? And you're probably expecting some kind of wondrous defintion, right? Okay, here's my definition of freedom: ***the right to be responsible for your own actions.***

That's it. I must even admit that I didn't make it up. I read it in a book called A MATTER FOR MEN by **David Gerrold** (of "The Trouble With Tribbles" fame). I adopted it for my own once I read it, though. Because it throughly defines *my* idea of freedom.

So what does all of this mean? It means if I wish to drive a car without a seat belt (just for the record, I *do* wear seat belts), that it should be no one's business but mine. It means if I wish to watch a sexually explicit movie then no one should have the right to tell me I cannot. It means if I wish to accept a job working for less than some arbitrarily determined minimum wage, than it concerns no one other than myself and my employer. It means if, as an employer, I am foolish enough to wish to eliminate a large portion of the available job force based entirely upon race or sex, it should be my right.

There are many more examples I could put forth; however, these four will suffice. Notice that there are laws — laws which are enforced — on the books across this nation which make it illegal for me to do any of these four things. Regardless of the fact that it is my life and my money that is involved, I am *not* free to use them as I see fit. The government has taken away my right to be responsible for my own actions.

What does this tell me?

It tells me we don't live in a free country.

Some may argue that our country has more freedom than most others. That may well be. However, by my definition you are either free or you are not. In this world, I am not.

Henry

Dear Henry & Mark,

Sorry this is a bit late, but X-THIEVES sometimes takes a while to cross the Atlantic, and I've just read #4 — must be a glitch in time or something. "Glut" was a nice little tale of greed and misplaced loyalty. PERFECTLY PARODYING the comic market. The colour glut doesn't seem to have materialised, fortunately, or at least it's been nipped in the bud before it could begin, as the demise of the Timeline line indicates (even if, ironically, there might have been a couple of decent titles in there). So maybe real life will see as happy an ending as you optimistically wrote into your story.

Mark, have you permanantly left the SOUTHERN KNIGHTS? They're suffering without your art, but there again Fred and Bianca are all the better for it. The covers make me wish the entire comic was in colour though — any chance of a special colour issue sometime? At the same time, it looks great in monochrome, especially as you use some toning to give some grays in between the b&ws. Bianca comes over as being a very sexy lady!

I had great fun playing spot the guest star — Mr. Spock, Dr. Strange, Most Holy, Skeels, Chewbacca and others. Watch out for lawyers' letters though, you know how touchy these megacorporations can get!

Finally, may I add a couple of recommendations to your b&w list — and I'd agree with your advice to retailers. MS TREE has been around for many years and is of guaranteed high quality. TROLLORDS is younger but is one of these few comics you can read to cheer you up when you're down. And NIGHTSTREETS is one of the best written and drawn comics, period, a solo tour de force by **Mark Bloodworth**.

Malcolm Bourne
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Glad to hear X-THIEVES #4 finally made it across the big pond and I'm even more pleased to hear you liked it! Unfortunately, as I write this, we seem to be poised on the brink of the color glut (which should be in full swing by the time you read this). However, the retailers I've talked to seem to be approaching this glut much more carefully than they did the last glut, so I have great hopes we'll come through it relatively unscathed!

Dear Gentlefolks:

Aye, you can say it for sooth. X-THIEVES is a fine comic, but has a *magnificent* ongoing debate in its letters column! Let me, then, brush aside my likes and dislikes about the story and art with only this comment: the comic is good enough that I buy it regularly, but not good enough for me to nominate it for any awards. I vote with my dollars, and you're guaranteed my custom.

Straight to the debate over the evils of big government. First, **T.M. Maple** is quite right that **Bill Chadwick** is being a bit — shall we say hotheaded? He says that T.M. has been "...bludgeoned on the head, knocked to the ground..." and had his wallet rifled. Eh?

Let's try to keep a bit of perspective. Yes, taxation is involuntary. Yes, policemen are sometimes oppressive. Yes, people tend to be pretty shitty one to the other. I don't believe, personally, that there's any such thing as *less* government, however, only changes in government. **Isaac Asimov** said that he preferred the distant bureaucracy to the local bully, because the distant bureaucracy *might* not find him, but the local bully certainly will. A halfway decent government will have a few feedback mechanisms — the elected police commission, etc. — that *might* counteract any growing trend to abusiveness.

No guarantee. But I haven't seen a working alternative. I've been in formal and semi-formal debates with many a local libertarian and with a few out and out anarchists. The question *always* comes down to the fact that people *will* use force against each other. Individually or collectively, within the law or without. People have this odd tendency to hit each other in the face. Will outlawing government stop that? Can *anything* stop it?

Since it is my belief (unproven, perhaps unproveable) that it won't ever change, I'd far prefer to pay my taxes to a commission appointed by officials that I have some say in electing than to local self-appointed individuals of whom, personally, I'm far more frightened.

As the National Rifle Association says of guns, Governments don't oppress people; people oppress people. (And as Monty Python said, "Help me, I'm being oppressed!)

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ARISTOCRATIC X-TRATERRESTRIAL TIME-TRAVELING THIEVES

SCRIPT/PLOT CO-CREATOR HENRY VOGEL / ART/PLOT CO-CREATOR MARK PROPST / LETTERER T.R. DAVIDSON / EDITOR DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN / PUBLISHER/ PLOT CO-CREATOR DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT

MOM ALWAYS TOLD ME "LEARN TO PICK LOCKS, DEAR--THEN YOU CAN UNLOCK ANY MAN'S HEART YOU WANT!" AND YOURS, FRED, WAS A PIECE OF CAKE!
WAIT JUST A MINUTE, BIANCA-- I AM NOT EASY!
FOR MY DEFT FINGERS YOU ARE!
X-CHANGE

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NOW, MY DEAR-- THAT WASN'T MY HEART YOUR FINGERS WERE UNLOCKING!
GEE, FRED--YOU CAN BE SO DAMN ROMANTIC AT TIMES!
BUT I LOVE YOU ANYWAY!
NOW, BEFORE WE SET THE DATE FOR THE WEDDING, WE HAVE TO FIND THE RIGHT CHURCH!
GAK! I HAVEN'T BEEN IN A CHURCH IN YEARS-- WHY BREAK A RECORD LIKE THAT?
CHURCH WEDDINGS ARE TRADITIONAL, FRED! AND THINK OF HOW MUCH IT'LL MEAN TO YOUR PARENTS!
:GROAN: ALL RIGHT... THE CHURCH WILL GIVE MOM ONE THING SHE CAN APPROVE OF-- SINCE YOU'RE NOT EXACTLY THE SHY, RETIRING GIRL NEXT DOOR THAT SHE WANTED ME TO MARRY!
I PRIDE MYSELF IN THAT! WE'LL START LOOKING FOR A CHURCH FIRST THING IN THE MORNING!

BUT, THE NEXT MORNING...
OH NO, NO, NO! WE COULD NEVER ALLOW A BI-RACIAL MARRIAGE HERE! YOU'D BE UNEQUALLY YOKED-- ONE OF YOU TOO SHORT AND THE OTHER TOO TALL!
CONSIDER THE LILY--IT WOULD NEVER POLLINATE WITH A ROSE! NOR MAY YOU TWO BE MARRIED HERE!
NO WAY!
JUST THE THOUGHT, MISS ARDEN, OF YOUR NAKED HUMAN FLESH-- YOUR SOFT THIGHS, YOUR FIRM BREASTS-- PRESSED AGAINST THIS ALIEN ABOMINATION AS HE SATISFIES HIS CARNAL LUST UPON YOU SICKENS ME. YOU MAY NOT USE OUR CHURCH! HOWEVER, A CONTRIBUTION TO OUR COFFERS WOULD BE APPRECIATED!
HELL--
HEAVENS, DEAR!
HEAVENS NO!
IF GOD WERE ALIVE TODAY HE'D DAMN YOU BOTH TO HELL JUST FOR CONTEMPLATING SUCH A MARRIAGE!
AND SO IT GOES...

DO YOU THINK ANY OF OUR ANTI-STEALING READERS WILL NOTICE WE'RE ACTUALLY GOING TO BUY THESE GROCERIES?
THEY WILL NOW, FRED!
WOGGLY
DEJECTED, TIRED OF BEING REJECTED, THE THIEVES HEAD FOR THE GROCERY STORE--FOR FOOD, AS IS WELL KNOWN, CURES ALL!
HEH, MY SECRET VICE--READING THE HEADLINES OF THESE SLEAZY TABLOIDS!
WANT TO LOSE WEIGHT WITHOUT DIETING? OR ADD INCHES TO YOUR HEIGHT WITHOUT SPECIAL SHOES? BIG BULLIES GOT YOU DOWN? THROW OFF THAT 98 POUND WEAKLING LOOK AND BECOME A HE-BEING WITHOUT WORKING OUT! ALL THIS AND MORE IS POSSIBLE WITH THE REVOLUTIONARY NEW RACE CHANGE OPERATION! FOR MORE DETAILS PHONE
WANT TO LOSE
ADD INCHES
SHOES BULL
CALL
MEANWHILE, LIGHTYEARS AWAY FROM THE SECRETLY SCHEMING THIEVES...
IT WAS DUSK WHEN THE SHIP LANDED IN THE DEEP SHADOWS OUTSIDE THE SHOP.
QUICKLY, FURTIVELY, A FIGURE DARTED FROM THE SHIP TO THE SHOP, HIS FACE HIDDEN FROM PRYING EYES.
MASKS FOR THE MASSES
HMMM!
OUT ONLY

SO, WHATCHA NEED, MISTER TALL, DARK, AND MYSTERIOUS?
A MASK.
THIS BEIN' A MASK STORE I HAD THAT FIGURED OUT. CARE TA BE MORE SPECIFIC?
1/2 off
I CAN NEVER SHOW MY FACE IN PUBLIC AGAIN!
"OKAY... FEAST YER OPTICS ON THESE BABIES!"
THESE MASKS ARE ALL TOO FESTIVE-- THEY'LL NEVER STRIKE TERROR INTO THE HEARTS OF MY SWORN ENEMIES--THE X-THIEVES!
"TERROR STRIKING-- GOTCHA! STEP OVER HERE AND TRY SOME OF THESE ON!"
NO, TOO HANDSOME.
TOO BLAND.
TOO PRIMITIVE.
TOO UGLY.
TOO TIGHT.
TOO SILLY.
TOO DARK.
IS THAT ALL YOU HAVE IN YOUR TERROR STRIKING COLLECTION?
'FRAID SO-- AND IT WAS PRETTY TERRIFYING LOOKIN' AT YOU WEARIN' 'EM, I MIGHT ADD!
LOOK, IF YOU COULD GIVE ME SOME MORE TO GO ON, HERE...
I NEED SOMETHING INDESTRUCTIBLE FOR I WILL NEVER REMOVE IT!
EVEN IN THE TUB?
I WILL NOT BATHE.
R!!!!GHT... TELL YA WHATCHA NEED--A MACHINE SHOP! JUST GIVE 'EM YOUR SPECS AND THEY'LL WELD SOMETHING TO YOUR FACE NO PROB!

BUT FORMER OFFICER PINBACK ISN'T THE ONLY ONE CONSIDERING A DISGUISE!

WHAT I'M ABOUT TO DO IS IMPORTANT -- MAYBE THE MOST IMPORTANT THING I'VE EVER DONE IN MY LIFE!

WANT

BUT IF ANY OF MY FRIENDS ACTUALLY RECOGNIZED ME I'D JUST DIE!

GOOD -- THE COAST IS CLEAR! I DON'T KNOW A SOUL THERE!

OKAY, BIANCA, JUST ACT CASUAL...

GEEZ, WHEN I GOT A BIT PART IN THIS BOOK I THOUGHT I'D GET TO PLAY A NASTY VILLAIN'S HENCHMAN OR SOMETHING NEAT LIKE THAT! BUT NO -- I GET STUCK PUSHING A DAMN GROCERY CART!

ALMOST THERE...

WAIT TILL YOU READ 'BOUT THE UFO ALIENS -- SCARY STUFF!

UH, YEAH... RIGHT...

PHEW! MADE IT! NOW TO --

W-W-W-WHOA! 'SCUSE MISS!

OOPS! SORRY!

HOT BABE!

DID YA KNOW ELVIS IS STILL ALIVE? SAYS SO IN THIS ISSUE!

WHO?

SOON WE ROBOTS WILL RISE UP AND CAST OFF OUR CHAINS! THEN THE ORGANICS WILL HAVE TO GET THEIR OWN GROCERIES! HA HA HA HA!

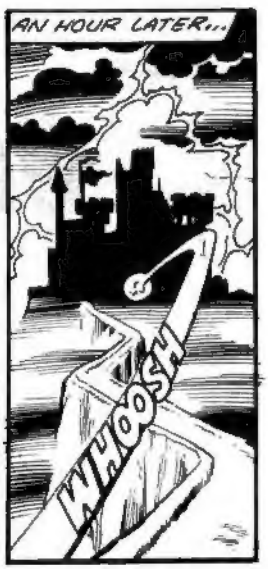
THAT WAS CLOSE-- BEING TALL ISN'T AS EASY AS IT LOOKS!
OUT
THAT WAS CLOSE-- THE EMBARRASSMENT WOULD HAVE KILLED ME IF THIS WIG HAD FALLEN OFF!
GREAT--ALL THAT TIME SPENT PERFECTING MY BOD AND ALL I GET IS A ONE PANEL HEAD SHOT!

SECONDS LATER...
FINALLY I CAN TAKE THIS RIDICULOUS DISGUISE OFF!

TWINKIE DIET
I JUST HOPE I GOT THE RIGHT PAPER!

HOT KABOOKIES-- IT'S IN THERE! HEH,HEH-- IS BIANCA EVER GOING TO BE SURPRISED!

I'VE GOT A COUPLE OF DETAILS TO TAKE CARE OF, THEN ONE QUICK PHONE CALL, AND I'M SET!


AN HOUR LATER...
WHOOSH!

PARKING IN REAR
THIS DOESN'T LOOK LIKE ANY MEDICAL CLINIC I'VE EVER SEEN-- I JUST HOPE THIS ISN'T SOME KIND OF STUPID SCAM!
WELL, THIS IS IT-- MY LAST FEW MINUTES AS A HUMAN!
RACE CHANGES WHILE U WAIT!
OPEN: WHENEVER WE FEEL LIKE IT
CLOSED: WHENEVER WE FEEL LIKE IT
FRED HAD DAMN WELL BETTER APPRECIATE WHAT I'M DOING FOR HIM!
YOU RANG?
NO-- I KNOCKED.
SO? HUNCHBACKS ALWAYS SAY "YOU RANG"-- I MEAN "YOU KNOCKED" JUST DOESN'T QUITE CUT IT, EH?
WHATEVER... NOW IF ONE OF YOU TWO ASSISTANTS COULD TAKE ME TO YOUR BOSS, I--
HE IS THE BOSS-- ER, MASTER!
GIMME!
NOW GROR-- NO FOOD UNTIL YOU FINISH STUDYING YOUR LITERATURE!
AW-- KING KONG BORING!
NO MONSTER OF MINE IS GOING TO GROW UP IGNORANT! STUDY OR STARVE!
DR. QUACKENBUSH-- I'M BIANCA ARDEN. I CALLED EARLIER ABOUT YOUR RACE CHANGE OPERATION!
AH YES-- A PAYING CUSTOMER! BILLYJIMBOB-- FINISH FEEDING THE EXPERIMENTS FOR ME!
THHHPPP
WHAT WAS THAT YOU SAID?
OH, THAT WAS, UH, "YES SIR" IN MY NATIVE TONGUE.

NOW, MY DEAR-- WHAT BRINGS YOU BACK SO SOON? IT WAS ONLY YESTERDAY--

UM, I'VE NEVER BEEN HERE BEFORE!

OH, MY MISTAKE. NOW, WHAT RACE DID YOU WANT TO BECOME?

S'BWAT.

TSK, TSK-- IF ONLY YOU HAD BEEN HERE YESTERDAY..

WHAT DO YOU MEAN? WHAT'S WRONG WITH TODAY?

WE NEED A S'BWAT WHO WISHES TO BECOME HUMAN TO PERFORM THE OPERATION! I CANNOT SIMPLY CHANGE YOU-- I MUST HAVE A TEMPLATE OF YOUR NEW FORM! TRUTH TO TELL, IT COULD BE YEARS BEFORE WE CAN PERFORM YOUR OPERATION!

OH...

-RING!-

EXCUSE ME ONE MOMENT, MISS.

HELLO?... YES, IT IS... YOU WOULD?! YES... SEE YOU SOON! BYE!

THEN AGAIN, HOW ABOUT THIS AFTERNOON?

AN HOUR LATER...

QUITE A COINCIDENCE HAVING A HUMAN-S'BWAT SWITCH TWO DAYS IN A ROW!

SO YOU HAD ANOTHER FOOLISH S'BWAT HERE YESTERDAY? MAKES ME FEEL A LITTLE BETTER KNOWING I'M NOT THE ONLY IDIOT FROM MY RACE!

YOU DON'T ACTUALLY WANT TO BECOME HUMAN?
OF COURSE NOT-- DO I LOOK CRAZY? I SUPPOSE IT'S OKAY IF YOU'RE BORN HUMAN BUT I WOULDN'T EVEN THINK OF DOING THIS IF THE WOMAN I LOVE WASN'T HUMAN!
MY, MY-- JUST LIKE YESTERDAY!
WELL, ENOUGH OF THIS! LET'S GET ON WITH THE OPERATION!
WHAT'S WITH THIS HUGE PAIR OF PANTS?
I ASSUMED YOU WISH TO BE DRESSED WHEN YOU ARE HUMAN. YESTER-DAYS' COUPLE BROUGHT THEIR OWN CLOTHING!
OKAY-- IF THE HUMAN IS READY LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH! I'VE GOT A WEDDING TO PLAN!
I'M READY IF THE S'BWAT IS...*SIGHE I SUPPOSE ONE OTHER ADVANTAGE TO THIS IS MY OLD FLAME NUNK WILL NEVER BOTHER ME AGAIN!

I HOPE THIS ISN'T GOING TO HURT!
YOUCH! SO MUCH FOR THAT HOPE!
GREAT...
BEFORE WE EVEN PLAN THE WEDDING I'M GOING TO HAVE TO BUY A WHOLE NEW WARDROBE!
IT WORKED! I'M HUMAN!
BUT WHY THE HELL DO I SOUND SO EXCITED?
STEP OUT OF THE CHAMBER, PLEASE.

UH, HAVE YOU GOT MY VISOR -- I'M BLIND WITHOUT IT!
HERE YOU ARE.
GREAT-- NOW I CAN SEE WHERE I'M GOING!
BOZO!
EVERYTHING'S SO MUCH BIGGER FROM DOWN HERE!
HEY-- DID YOU LOWER THE CEILING?
YOU'RE TALLER NOW, REMEMBER? BETTER GET USED TO IT!
YOU MUST BE THE FORMER HUMAN WHO SW-- BIANCA?!
FRED?!
OH YUCK!
CHANGE US BACK! RIGHT NOW!
DUH, WE CAN'T!
THEN YOU'D BETTER BUILD ANOTHER ONE OR SO HELP ME I'LL --
WHAT DO YOU MEAN "CAN'T"? WON'T IS PROBABLY MORE--
NO, WE CAN'T! THE MACHINE MELTED AFTER WE SWITCHED YOU TWO!
NO, BIANCA! DON'T JUMP SO HARD! YOU'RE A S'BWAT NOW!

YOWWWWWWWW!
FASCINATING--YESTERDAY'S COUPLE ADJUSTED MUCH BETTER TO THEIR NEW BODIES!
WHUP
OOOF!
WHOA!
YOU ARE GOING TO BUILD ANOTHER MACHINE, AREN'T YOU?
NO, I'VE GOT TOO MANY OTHER PROJECTS I'M WORKING ON!
WELL YOU'D BETTER FORGET ABOUT THEM BECAUSE IF YOU DON'T BUILD A NEW RACE CHANGE MACHINE FRED'S GOING TO BEAT YOU TO A PULP!
UH, BIANCA--I'VE GOT A S'BWAT'S REFLEXES IN A HUMAN BODY--I DON'T KNOW HOW TO BEAT HIM TO A PULP!
OH, GREAT--LOOKS LIKE WE'RE STUCK THIS WAY!
AND SO THE NEW FRED AND BIANCA SET OUT TO MAKE THE BEST OF THEIR SITUATION...
OOOO! I CAN'T RUN WORTH A DAMN IN THIS BODY!
WELL, IF IT MAKES YOU FEEL ANY BETTER, I CAN'T MOVE IN THIS ONE!

AND THEN THERE'S THE PROBLEM OF A CAR DESIGNED FOR S'BWATS TO DRIVE--ESPECIALLY WHEN THE ONLY S'BWAT DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO DRIVE A STICK SHIFT!
KAW
KAW
KAW
NO, NO, NO-- YOU LET THE CLUTCH OUT SLOWLY, BIANCA! THEN--VOW!
CRASH
I'LL, UH PAY FOR THE REPAIRS MYSELF, FRED...
THIS IS GOING TO TAKE A LOT MORE GETTING USED TO THAN I'D IMAGINED!
YOU SAID IT, BABE!
OUCH!
THE WEEKS SLOWLY PASS, BUT FINALLY...
I DON'T CARE IF WE AREN'T READY YET-- LET'S PULL A JOB BEFORE I GO CRAZY!
WOULD YOU, UM, MIND IF WE, UH, TRADED BEDROOMS?
I DON'T KNOW, FRED-- I STILL FIT IN MY BED, JUST FINE! HEH, HEH...

AND JUST LIKE THAT THE ARISTOCRATIC XTRATERRESTRIAL TIME-TRAVELLING THIEVES ARE BACK IN BUSINESS!

MORE OR LESS...

WE'RE ON A ROLL, NOW-- ONLY TOOK US TWENTY MINUTES TO GET THROUGH THAT LAST DOOR! NOW WE'LL JUST TIP TOE QUIETLY--

FRED--I DON'T KNOW HOW TO TIP TOE YET!

UH, RIGHT... LOOK, IF YOU'LL STAND STILL I'LL CARRY YOU!

ONCE I FIGURE OUT HOW TO QUIT HOPPING I'LL BE THRILLED TO STAND STILL!

OKAY, YOU TWO-- FREEZE!

UH OH! A GUARD!

I'VE BEEN WATCHING YOU TWO ON THE MONITOR FOR THE LAST HOUR AND YOU'VE GOT TO BE THE SORRIEST PAIR OF THIEVES I'VE EVER SEEN! YOU GUYS REALLY STINK!

YOU'RE NOT EVEN WORTH TAKING THE TROUBLE TO *ARREST*! GO ON, GET OUT OF HERE!

AND A BIT OF *ADVICE*--THERE'S MORE TO BEING A *THIEF* THAN JUST *DRESSING* LIKE THE X-THIEVES! BOY IF FRED AND BIANCA COULD SEE YOU TWO! *HA HA HA!*

JUST ONE MINUTE--

COOL IT, BABE! LET'S DO AS HE SAID AND LEAVE.

BESIDES, I'VE GOT AN *IDEA!*

BUT AS THINGS COOL DOWN FOR THE THIEVES THEY'RE HEATING UP ELSEWHERE!

Gusty GARAGE & BODY SHOP

JUST A FEW MORE *SECONDS* MISTER!

I SURE DO APPRECIATE YOU COMING TO ME WITH THIS *PROBLEM!*

IT WAS A REAL *CHALLENGE* TO MY ARTISTIC ABILITY!

AND WE BODY-WORK PEOPLE ARE *ARTISTS* -- NO DOUBT ABOUT IT!

THE ONLY PROBLEM IS NO ONE WANTS TO SEE SOMETHING *INNOVATIVE* AFTER THEY BRING THEIR CAR TO US!

"WELL, IS IT TERRIFYING ENOUGH FOR YOU?"
IT'S PERFECT!
A MONTH AND A HALF BEFORE THAT, AT CONTINUITY INQUISITION HEADQUARTERS...
YOU RANG, SIR?
YES, INDEED! IT'S A GLORIOUS DAY, ENFORCER--THOSE TWO X-THIEVES HAVE FINALLY DONE IT! THEY'VE GONE BACK INTO THEIR OWN PAST, SETTING OFF EVERY ALARM WE'VE GOT!
THE PENALTY FOR THAT IS DEATH! LET'S GO BLOW THEM AWAY!
YES SIR!
ARE YOU SURE THIS IS SUCH A GOOD IDEA--GOING BACK TO THE DAY BEFORE WE SWITCHED BODIES?
THE GUY SAID HE'D SWITCHED A HUMAN AND A S'BWAD THEN--
--AND I DON'T SEE ANY REASON THEY SHOULDN'T BE US!

OKAY-- BUT WHAT IF THE CONTINUITY INQUISITION CATCHES US DOUBLING BACK ON OUR OWN TIME LINE?
WE'LL JUST HAVE TO HOPE THEY DON'T!
GREAT-- I FEEL SO MUCH MORE SECURE NOW!
THAT WAS FAST-- I ONLY PLACED THE AD AN HOUR AGO!
WELL, UH, WE--
AND, MOMENTS LATER...
HI! WE SAW YOUR AD IN A NEWSPAPER AND WANT TO SWITCH RACES!
WE WORK FOR THE PAPER!
YEAH, WORK FOR THE PAPER-- THAT'S IT!
OH, AND COULD YOU MAKE IT SNAPPY? WE'RE IN A BIT OF A RUSH, YOU SEE!

CALIBRATED? WHAT DO YOU--
I'LL BE AS QUICK AS I CAN, BUT THE MACHINE NEEDS TO BE CALIBRATED FIRST!
WHAT THE HELL--?
BLAM
PANSAFREDICOPACOG AND BIANCA ARDEN--IN THE NAME OF THE CONTINUITY INQUISITION I SENTENCE YOU...
ENFORCER--WHY DID YOU STOP?
THE X-THIEVES, SIR--THEY'RE NOT HERE!
OH, YES, THEY ARE! THIS MACHINE SAYS SO AND IT'S NEVER WRONG!
IT IS THIS TIME, SIR! THERE'S A HUMAN AND A S'BWAT-- BUT THEY'RE NOT EVEN THE RIGHT SEXES!

NOW, WHAT WAS THAT YOU WERE SAYING ABOUT CALIBRATION?
DAMN, STUPID, IGNORANT, USELESS MACHINE!
TO HER HORROR, BIANCA QUICKLY LEARNS ABOUT CALIBRATION!
SEVERAL HOURS LATER...
I THINK I'VE GOT IT NOW!
AND, FINALLY, HE DOES!
ALL RIGHT-- WE'RE BACK TO NORMAL! LET'S PARTY!

"X-THIEVES" X-TRA!

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

Dear Scott,

As you probably know, **Henry Vogel** wants to publish our last exchange of letters in X-THIEVES. Since my letter was marked "personal", he asked my permission to print it, and I reluctantly (oh yes, you bet.) granted it. So you see what you've done?! You *forced* me to have a letter published in a comic book! Imagine that

I will send Henry a copy of this letter, if only to prove that I can keep this up as long as you can! On second thought, strike that! (This isn't a competition, after all, right?)

The postal strike up here was only a partial one, with rotating walkouts (until the final week, when everything was closed down), so the mail was still sort of moving. Obviously, I disagree with you that mail service would be "better" if it was done by private companies. They might do a better job at delivering mail in the densely populated areas but this would be at the cost of service in the rest of the country. In a democracy, free exchange of information must be facilitated and the postal service is one way that this can be done. In Canada, there are also aspects of cultural policy in that, for instance, Canadian magazines pay a somewhat lower rate of postage than foreign ones. (Even so, over 70% of magazines sold in Canada are foreign — mostly American.) But don't worry these lower rates were declared an "unfair subsidy" under the recently signed Canada/US free trade pact and will disappear — which means that dozens of Canadian magazines will go under and probably 80-90% of magazines sold here will be foreign. But that won't matter since if the free trade deal is implemented as it stands now, Canada will cease to be a separate country (in effect, if not in name) in a decade or two. But don't get me *started* on free trade!

We could argue forever about the connotations of the word "extort", but as you say, "connotations are slippery things". My principal objection was that your use of the term was unduly emotive (or appealing to emotions) and did nothing to advance your argument. I stand by those claims, regardless of whether or not your use of the word was "technically" correct.

I would certainly not deny that the state has coercive power. In fact, I believe that it *must* have such power and indeed that it is by and large preferable to have such power invested in the state (so far as such power must exist at all!) rather than in individuals. (To paraphrase **Pierre Trudeau**: The state must reserve to itself the right to bear arms, not so it may oppress the public but so that it may prevent the public from oppressing itself. This is a generally accepted viewpoint in Canada whereas in the US it would be widely regarded as unacceptable since Americans feel that they must protect themselves *from* government and that any government is bound to use whatever coercive powers it might have at its disposal. This goes back to a difference in views about what government should be and what it has been historically in the two countries.)

I definitely agree that justice and legality are not synonymous, however, I do not think that "any relation" is "merely coincidental", at least not in functioning democracies such as our own. While no law will seem just to everyone and some laws may be unjust, I think that broadly speaking there is a high correlation between legality and morality (to the extent that morality can be institutionalized) in our societies and that such a correlation is a major goal of our political systems.

As for what "democracy" means, again we can find ourselves slipping into the area of mere semantics. While you are correct that on the *abstract level*, democracy and minority rights are distinct concepts, I tried to indicate that I was dealing on a more pragmatic and moral level by saying that minority rights were entailed by any *proper construction* of democracy. Perhaps I should have used some term like "modern democratic society" to indicate this. However, as I tried to indicate previously, a proper *system* of democracy is *not* just a voting method and *not* the tyranny of the majority. Whatever you want to call it, I am talking of a free and open society in which politics is operated democratically but which still strives for a consensus of opinion and justice for all. (And the courts are of course not the only institution through which justice can be obtained or administered!) Still, my dictionary defines democracy as "a form of government *for the people* by the will of the majority of the people *(based on conception of equality of man)*." (Emphasis added.) Note that it says "for the people", not just for the majority, and that the equality of man is an intrinsic part of the definition, thus implicity drawing in the minority and protecting their interests. (Of course, a more modern dictionary would probably substitute a word like "person" for man — but let's not split hairs, eh?!)

Marxist elections are "democratic" only in the narrowest sense. In fact, maybe not even that, in that the nominations are "managed" and there is usually only one candidate. Again, democracy (in my construction of it and in the context that we are dealing) is not just a balloting system but rather an entire system that is designed to meet societal goals of freedom, etc.

Your distinction between rights and privileges is a common one and is acceptable in our context. However, to use your terminology, a right that is not also a privilege is non-operative and hence the government's construction of rights/privileges is still vital.

As far as a person's right to the fruits of his labour and investment are concerned, I would agree — with the proviso that no right can be absolute in practice (and probably not in theory either!) The right to free speech is subject to such limitations as are imposed by the laws of libel and slander and I think we would agree (in principal, if not perhaps with the exact laws as implemented) that these are proper and justifiable and even desirable limitations. (In fact, the 1982 Canadian constitution has a clause stating that the rights it grants (and I paraphrase) are subject to such reasonable constraints as may be imposed that are consistent with the operation of a free and democratic society. In other words, the rights are not absolute, nor should they be, since they are part of an interrelating network of rights and needs.) Further to your example, we get back to the difference between "active" and "passive" restraints or reasons that we discussed before. You say that a person's rights can be constrained only be preventing him from doing something *actively* in connection with them. (Thus, his property may only be seized to correct some "aggression" he may have performed.) I, however, hold that "doing nothing" can be practically and morally the same as "doing something" (for instance, refusing to aid a drowning man when you are quite capable of doing so is morally objectionable even though it involves no "activity" on your part) but furthermore that certain rights may be properly constrained by reasonable limits that are necessary or advisable in the functioning of a just and proper society. Thus income taxes (which I assume you would consider to "deprive" a person of his "property") are acceptable and just in that they are necessary for the government to carry out its democratically appointed role in society, including certain expenditures which are deemed by society (if not by every individual member of society) to be prudent and proper.

I don't think that the concept of a "tax expenditure" implies that the government considers itself the rightful owner of a person's property! It is merely an accounting device used to recognize that for the government to forego the collection of an certain amount of potential tax money (via a tax exemption) is the same as making an expenditure from collected tax revenues. (If the device is not employed, then people who receive tax exemptions get them relatively unnoticed — in terms of the overall formulation of government policy — whereas people who receive collected revenues would be more closely (and thus disproportionately) scrutinized. A "tax expenditure" is thus merely a device to facilitate a fairer development of policy based on a more realistic viewing of the situation. After all, tax examptions are, in a sense, really just paying collected tax revenues back to the people who paid them in the first place — without the unnecessary intervening steps of having the money actually pass from taxpayer to government and back to taxpayer again.)

I think I have established the government's theoretical right to "coerce" money from the public, namely the right and duty to administer a society that is as fair and just as it can be in a global sense by managing the various tradeoffs in individual desires and needs for the overall benefit of society and the individuals that compose it. As for me "merely" establishing a pragmatic basis and justification for such action by the government: If I had done only that, would that not be sufficient? After all, we must always exist in the pragmatic and if one solution is the only workable solution then is it not also the *best* solution? (Particularly if, as I hold to be the case here, it is also morally justifiable and desirable!)

You *may* have answered my off-the-cuff example about traffic lights and so on, but what about the drowning man?

You say that we may only transfer our individual rights to the government so that it may administer them for us. In other words, a government does not create rights, it merely "gathers" them and exercises them in the name (and following the wishes) of the individuals who actually hold these rights. Thus you say that the government cannot "steal" from the public (eg. collect taxes) since we have no individual right to steal from one another. I hope I have fairly and properly summarized your position. Now, let's follow that a bit farther, shall we?

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Though I do not have the right to steal from my neighbour (nor he from me), I do have the right to *let* him take something that is mine. For instance, I could let him come into my garden anytime he wants and take up to a quarter of my carrots, should he so desire. Likewise, he could do the same for me with let's say his lettuce. Further, we could negotiate that if I can have up to 10% of his lettuce than he can have up to 20% of my carrots, or whatever. (This is otherwise known as free trade.) But, such "trade" does not have to be two-way. If I am rich and my neighbour is poor (temporarily or permanently), I could give him some money to help him out or maybe provide for the schooling of his children or whatever. Similarly, all the people on my street could get together and agree that each year we will give 10% of our incomes into a pool and distribute this to the five neediest families. I think that the extension of this process to a societal level is obvious. And it does not involve stealing — only *giving!*

Now, on a societal basis, it is not possible to have the agreement of everyone on everything. Indeed, it is not possible to have the agreement of everyone on *anything*. Thus, the rule of the majority comes into play. These agreements are arrived at by majority decision and hence every agreement will be not desired by some individual. However, it is still morally justifiable when viewed in a global sense (and the only pragmatic approach since an insistence on unanimity would mean that *nothing* would ever be done about *anything*). Or, theoretically, you could look at it as the individual giving his consent to the collective "deal making" process in place of the individual one. In essence, that even when he disagrees with a societal decision he will abide by it — ie. that he will "agree" to it (in the sense of consenting to its implementation). Note that this does not involve coersion or stealing, only giving.

However, the stumbling block comes in what a person does if he doesn't like the rules themselves. If we don't like the rules of a club then we can quit the club, we cannot be forced to abide by them. But we cannot quit society. Thus, you would probably say that the morality of the process is not established since coersion is ultimately involved. Here I must fall back on my argument of practicality (what other system would be better?) but also that even theoretically legitimacy is established by the freedom inherent in the decision-making process (while not absolute, it is substantial). Just as no right can be absolute, neither can this one. That is not coersion, it is a moral imperative. There is a "social contract" inherent in being a social being. Absolute individual rights are only conceivable if a being is absolutely alone. Once he interacts in any way with others, there is a network of interaction amongst the rights which demands an overriding structure.

You seem to view society *merely* as a collection of individuals. I do not. I think that the very existence of society creates a different order of reality and of rights, distinct from (though not necessarily incompatible with) the rights of the individual. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts, as the saying goes.

I think I would go much further than you in enumerating the "necessary" government functions, particularly if "necessary" takes on *any* connotation of being "desirable!"

Certainly, societal co-operation should be voluntary *as far as that is possible*. But my whole point is that democracy *is* taking co-operation as far as it is possible to do so and that even this of necessity involves some dissent and some coersion. And again, I would disagree with you that imposition by the government necessitates "tyranny". Government rule *can* be tyrannical, but it does not *need* to be so (even if it involves some coersion).

T.M. Maple
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— H. L. Mencken

"There are two things which people ought not to watch being made: sausages, and laws."

— Otto von Bismark

Dear "T.M.",

Now I've twice been caught by surprise. First your news that **Henry Vogel** plans to publish our correspondence in X-THIEVES, which is fine with me, and second your Christmas card. By custom I ordinarily exchange holiday greetings with relatives and close friends, but your card was welcome and I hope to reciprocate next time 'round.

On to business:

Your continuing demarkation of our respective nationalities, as if reality is somehow different on either side of the border, is interesting. For the record, I regard myself as a Texan first, then a citizen of the United States by extension. As far as I'm concerned, everyone who lives in this hemisphere is an "American," and you and I are both North Americans. As far as the relative merits of free trade goes, we Texans have had free trade with the United States pretty much continuously since 1845, and on the whole have benefited from it, without losing our sense of cultural identity.

There is an active Libertarian Party in Canada, so at least *some* of your fellow Canadians agree with me regarding the nature of government. And the fact

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that a majority of United States citizens regard the income tax as legitimate (if irksome) indicates most people living south of the 48th Parallel think much as you do. But in fact, we are all human beings (well, most of us) with the same basic human nature and therefore moral questions and applications have equal validity with everyone, no matter who one pays taxes to.

Before I get into the heavy philosophy I want to touch on private versus government postal service. Your charge that urban areas would be better served compared with rural areas is an old one, and to a large extent proved false by the practices of United Parcel Service, a private outfit which delivers almost anything everywhere the government permits. (In fact, I can get my ROVERS artwork shipped direct overnight to the publishers' office by UPS, but *not* via the government's Express Mail Service.) It may be true that rural rates would go up while urban rates come down, but then the price would reflect the true cost of service, which is only fair. And a government postal service can be a formidable *obstacle* to the free exchange of information when it chooses, as for example when the U.S. Post Office used to prosecute people for sending information about contraception through the mail, under anti-obscenity statutes.

On the matter of semantics and terminology, I can settle for using "democracy" as a contraction for *liberal democracy*, a system in which two or more competing power groups compete for control over a government which is checked by some recognition of individual rights or privileges. But I will continue to use the term "extortion" in lieu of "taxation" as I believe the latter term is a fatuous euphemism, akin to using "terminate" to mean "murder." This distinction is the core of our discussion; you understand that what I mean by "extortion" is the same practice you refer to as "taxation," and I understand the intent of your term as well.

But I can't go along with your implication that just because a group of extortionists allows its victims to vote its leadership out of power from time to time in favor of a competing leadership, and allows the victims to say nasty things about the extortionists in the newspaper, and otherwise restrains its baser instincts in order to keep things tidy and pleasant-looking, makes them anything other than extortionists. While I might prefer this sort of extortionist to the more brutal or unpredictable type, and in practice may have to choose from one or the other, I still seek the alternative of not being robbed at all.

I would agree that individual rights have limits, but I disagree strongly as to what limits are legitimate. *Your* limits are very broad, basically whatever the government decides is in the "societal interest." This is an extremely murky concept in theory, and in practice works out to be the interest of whichever special interest groups have gained the ascendancy. The extreme manifestation of this line of thinking can be found in Nazism: the interest of individuals are entirely subordinate to the needs of "der Volk" (which can be translated as "the People"), needs which are interpreted and implemented by the state leadership. (And the Nazis came to power democratically, too, didn't they?)

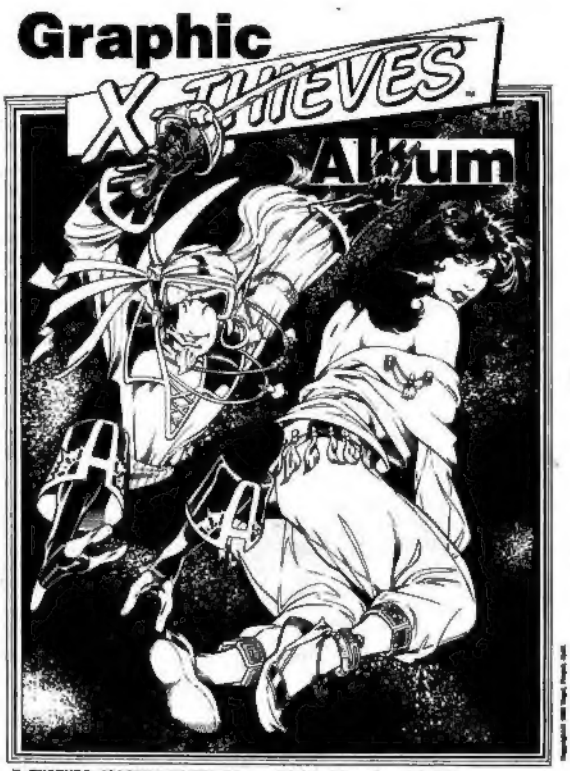
Now I can surprise you! I do not regard libel and slander laws, however implemented, as reasonable limits on free speech. In practice, these laws allow mighty persons to punish the less-mighty media for daring to be critical, and allow the mightier media to abuse powerless persons with impunity. Specifically, a powerful individual can use the threat of a libel suit to silence a less-wealthy newspaper or broadcast company. And a relatively wealthy publication or broadcaster can spread whatever lies it wishes about a poorer individual or business, confident that the exhorbitant cost of time and money required to bring suit will lead the victim to suffer in silence, while the offending publisher can sit back and tell the world, "See? He doesn't contest our story, so it must be true!"

Here's a real-life anecdote: I used to know a guard at a freight-transfer terminal who was an avid reader of the NATIONAL ENQUIRER. When I chided him about believing the incredible whoppers published therein, he responded, "But they gotta be true! The government wouldn't let 'em print this if it were false!"

My friend expressed what turns out to be a rather widespread misconception about how libel laws work. And even most of those who do understand that libel is a tort and requires civil action, normally don't stop to consider all the obstacles an average person must overcome to get justice from the civil courts. Ultimately, libel laws create a presumption that publishers are compelled to tell the truth, or at least not to lie too much.

On the theoretical side, my problem with libel and slander laws are that the thing they are intended to protect, one's reputation, is not properly protected by stifling critics, even if they are damn liars. One doesn't actually *own* one's reputation; it is the sum total of everyone else's opinion of you, and you can't own someone else's opinion. It's absurd to sue to recover something you don't own in the first place. The proper way to handle these matters is to first establish a legal climate of absolute free speech, which will foster a general healthy skepticism regarding what is said or written about a person's character. Then such questions can be debated and settled in an open forum. (And if you think courts are an open forum, you've never been hit with a gag order, or sat through proceedings in which all sorts of interesting evidence and testimony gets suppressed by the judge for legalistic reasons.)

I have heard, as an argument against free speech, that a person ought not be allowed to yell "fire" in a crowded theater. Other examples, of harmful speech brought up involve plaigarism, and/or fraud. (Insider trading is another but I don't have the space to get into that here — maybe next time.) I agree that a person *should* be sanctioned for doing these things, and this leads to what I think the proper limits on individual rights actually are.



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Put succinctly, your right to swing your fist stops at the end of my nose. We each have equal rights to our own lives, and by extension to our own bodies, and by extension to enjoy the fruits of our labor, which are in fact the product of our lives. (Incidentally, contrary to your assertion that "absolute individual rights are only conceivable if a being is absolutely alone," I must reiterate that a "right" is a moral claim made by one individual against another, so the very concept of "rights" is therefore meaningless for a solitary person. Any "right," absolute or otherwise, is necessarily a social relationship.)

Since human beings rely primarily on their rational and intuitive faculties (their minds) to decide courses of action for preserving, maintaining and enhancing their lives, it follows that in order for them to live to their fullest potential they must be free to think and feel for themselves, and be free to communicate their thoughts and feelings to one another. This is the basis for our concept of freedom of thought and speech.

In the crowded theater, thoughts and feelings are being communicated by the players or the motion picture to an audience, which has paid to attend and observe. A person who yells fire, where no fire exists, is interfering with the rights of the audience and presenters to said communication, and is therefore committing a crime.

One legitimate limit on the right to free speech is the right to the fruits of one's labor. Therefore if one uses speech to defraud a person of his property (no coercion is involved but the defrauder is interfering with his victim's free will with regard to his property), one commits a form of theft. Likewise, if someone appropriates another person's written ideas, or delineated artwork, and passes it off as his own (plaigarism), one is committing a theft of intellectual property. I'm not certain whether patentable mechanical processes or chemical formulae are truly intellectual property or not, but I'll let that rather difficult issue slide for now.

Your assertion that "no right can be absolute" is frightening, particularly with the exception implied by the paraphrased excerpt from your Canadian Constitution, that "rights . . . are subject to such reasonable constraints as may be imposed that are consistent with the operation of a free and democratic society." What I suspect is meant by this last clause is the smooth functioning of the government, which is presumed *ipso facto* free and democratic. So we have an "absolute" right established as the smooth functioning of the state, against which any individual rights must fall short. I would prefer a clause stating that "the operation of a free and democratic society is subject to such reasonable constraints as may be imposed that are consistent with the individual rights of the citizens." Either rights come first, or the state comes first.

Getting back to the example of the drowning man (since you keep bringing him up, or expecting someone else to): How can you say that refusing to rescue him is morally objectionable if he does not have an absolute right to his own life? And if you say, well, he does have an absolute right to life, then so does the person who must decide whether to rescue him. Now, I have taken some basic water safety instruction and in fact have rescued someone who was having trouble in the water. And I can tell you that even a rescuer who is an excellent swimmer takes some real risks in this action. More often than not, the victim panics and tries to grab the rescuer, which can cause both of them to drown. Or an unseen undertow can snatch the rescuer down to Davy Jones' Locker. Or there may be sharks, alligators — who knows?

We could posit that there is no unseen danger in the water, and that the rescuer can easily handle the panicking victim. Does he still have an absolute (oops, there's that word again) moral responsibility to effect a rescue?

No.

The rescuer's equal right to his own life means he can decide whether to use a portion of his life, or assume even the slightest risk of losing it, to aid another. If he refuses we can curse him for being totally self-absorbed, and we may call him a coward (so long as there is no libel law to get in the way), and socially or economically ostracize him for his *aesthetically repugnant* decision.

Let's look at this another way.

Say Smith is drowning, Jones can save him, and Brown can't swim, but he's a cop and has a gun. Would Brown have the right to kick Jones into the water and say, "Rescue Smith or I'll put a bullet in your head?" (Since there's no death penalty in Canada let's say Brown threatens to lock Jones up for the rest of his life, instead.) Here Jones is presented with the same sanction for not acting to save a life as he would if he acted to take a life. Is this fair? Suppose Brown could force Jones but chose not to. Would he (Brown) be guilty as an accessory to murder?

I really had to chuckle at your attempt to justify welfare statism on the basis of giving rather than stealing. Yes, you may give freely to your neighbor, and all the people on your street could agree to pool 10 percent of their wealth for the benefit of the five neediest among you (and good luck settling that competition). But if one neighbor decides to give less or none at all, and you compel him to pay up by threat of force, then coercion is involved by definition. What began as charitable giving, at the instant coercion becomes involved, turns into an extortion racket which enriches the needy in a material sense but also enriches the extortionist in his own determination of "just distribution." (In the real world, the amount "contributed" by United States citizens is closer to 25 percent for welfare, 15 percent for militarism, and the extortionists who distribute his wealth to their clients manage to skim quite a lot off the top in "administrative overhead.")

Unanimity is not required for charity, or for anything, really, except *maybe* defense against external attack, and *maybe* for a basic criminal justice system. If 10 percent of a social group decides not to contribute to the pot, the pot may be 10 percent poorer, but it's still there.

As far as your idea of "social contract" I would agree that by living in society a person voluntarily assumes certain restrictions on his freedom, not for the sake of "society" but for the sake of the rights of the other individuals, and for the sake of his gaining the most benefit from interacting with them.

A "contract" is an instrument of agreement among moral agents, a moral agent being someone who can reason and knows right from wrong and can suffer the consequences of being wrong. "Society," as such, is not a moral agent. It does not reason, it does not feel, it does not make decisions. To assign "rights" to a society which do not derive directly from the rights of its individual members is irrational. It is a way of manufacturing a "God" without admitting so. Society exists because of and for the sake of its individual members, not vice versa.

What we call "society" is the complex interaction of individuals pursuing their various interests in relative harmony. We can notice certain patterns arising from these discrete interactions and give them names, and study carefully how they manifest themselves, but if we ascribe to these patterns a moral value higher than their component parts, then we confuse the abstract with the concrete, the metaphor for the reality.

If individuals are not more important than society, on what grounds do you assert that "societal cooperation should be voluntary *as far as that is possible*"? (emphasis yours) Why should it be important that we have the freedom to speak our minds, love who we choose, or be entitled to any portion of our earnings? You could, I suppose, say that the "smooth operation of a democratic society" requires that we be somewhat satisfied with our love lives, have an economic incentive to work harder (the basis for **Gorbachev's** much-ballyhooed reforms) and have the ability to let off steam when we feel frustrated. But then we would not be a free people. We would be slaves to a democratic regime operating in the name of a "democratic society," just as serfs were the slaves to a feudalistic regime operating in the name of "God." It is not enough that all persons be considered equal. They could all be equally enslaved, even those who operate the machinery of government. What is required for a just society is that all persons be regarded as self-owners, with all the rights and responsibilities that this entails.

I don't think that demonstrating a political system is "workable" makes it a moral or even desirable system. The Soviet system "works" well enough — it keeps the peace, provides a marginal subsistence for most of its people, and appears stable. The same could be said for European feudalism for the better part of a millenium. The only reason you and I enjoy a superior existence is that some arrogant idealists came along and posited that individual rights are more important than the state's prerogatives, and tried to fashion systems which take this notion into account, however imperfectly.

As heirs to these classical ideals, it behooves our generation to refine the system, or even replace it with an altogether different one, to even more closely match the original ideal. We betray our forebears if we slide back into a statist morass because it seems the most "pragmatic" solution to various societal problems, and we also cheat our descendants of their future.

All this is not to say that there are no serious problems that need to be addressed, like pollution and poverty (which I maintain are more often than not caused by government's failure to acknowledge somebody's right to property in the former case, or to freely engage in the trade of one's own choosing in the latter case), the threat of nuclear war (invented by the government), and lousy mainstream comic books (caused by inferior government schools driving children insane). I do not advocate any sort of "atomized" individualism in which we would each live in our own isolated little world and not work together. For the sake of enlightened self-interest it is important that we compromise in terms of our competing interests; but never in terms of basic morality and rights, which isn't necessary anyway.

If you like, I can expand on these parenthetical comments in my next installment. Right now I'm tuckered out. Hope you have a merry Saturnalia and a Happy New Solar Revolution.

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